

# New visitor services manager for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Janet Schmidt

Braving the myriad of elements that a trip through Alaska in December could effortlessly throw our way, my husband, Keith and I stuffed our Subaru Outback with everything I could remotely perceive as necessity, and we made our way from our home of 20 years in Fallon, Nevada, to our new home on the Kenai Peninsula. As the newly appointed Visitor Services Manager for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, I could hardly contain my excitement—actually, I don't think I even tried.

I was the Visitor Services Manager for Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge located in Fallon, 60 miles east of Reno, Nevada. It was there I cut my teeth with the National Wildlife Refuge System, learning and growing a substantial public use program from the ground up. Life in the high desert of the Great Basin was not without its wondrous, fulfilling adventures. An hour's drive to the mighty Sierra Nevadas, the state is (believe it or not), the most mountainous in the union—not the tallest or most beautiful mountains, mind you, (speaking as a new Alaskan I think we know which state would win that title) but Nevada enjoys the most mountain ranges of all 50 states. And, seemingly every Nevada house has a horse in the back, and ours was no exception—we have two. We would spend many a weekend camping and riding in the desert as well as the cooler mountain passes. The horses, however, have asked that they be allowed to remain in Nevada with our daughter, Sally, and our two grandsons, Josh and Ethan as they are not at all sure they would appreciate the trees and colder temperatures.

Long ago, I began my working career as a freelance photojournalist in Maine, where I lived for 32 years. For some inconceivable reason, I thought it would be a good idea to strike out and join the U.S. Navy to try and secure a seat in their highly acclaimed journalism school, but a slot in that school never opened up. Instead I became a Yeoman, which is administrative, but the position allowed me to serve as a collateral

duty Public Affairs Officer at every station I served, while managing busy personnel offices for Naval F-18 squadrons. My first duty station was Fallon Naval Air Station, which boasts a rich and productive history, and is now the home of The Naval Strike & Air Warfare Center—alias, Top Gun. Fallon NAS is the last station pilots train before they are sent to the aircraft carriers, and one of the few places remaining where pilots can train with live ammunition. It was there I met and married Keith, who retired from the Navy after 22 years and now works at Stillwater Refuge as an Equipment Operator. We have 3 daughters, and the aforementioned 2 grandsons.

From Maine to Nevada with a short, two-year deviation to the Far East, stationed in Yokosuka, Japan, during the Gulf War, our little family is certainly well-traveled. After 6 ½ years in the Navy, however, I chose another path and received my B.S. in Resource Management from the University of Nevada, Reno. In 1995 I began volunteering for Stillwater Refuge, and after 1½ years they finally decided that they would just hire me, because they just couldn't seem to get rid of me. My tenure there ended at the end of November 2008 with my decision to again try something a little different. I'm lucky to have such a patient and willing family.

And, I'm fortunate to work in my chosen field as a member of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In my mind, it is truly one of the most diverse, challenging and satisfying jobs anyone could have. And, since my arrival to the great state of Alaska, I have found the Refuge and the area to be everything I expected and more. I am proud to join such a great team here at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

*Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*